

Message Text

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ACTION SCS-06

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CA-01 SSO-00 CAB-05 CIAE-00
COME-00 DODE-00 DOTE-00 EB-08 INR-10 NSAE-00
FAA-00 L-03 INRE-00 FSE-00 ABF-01 PA-02 ICAE-00
H-02 PPTE-00 /051 W
-----092008 271256Z /44

O 271232Z JUL 78
FM AMEMBASSY LONDON
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8569

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 LONDON 11918

DEPT PASS: ALL EUROPEAN DIPLOMATIC AND CONSULAR POSTS

E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: CASC, UK
SUBJECT: US CITIZENS STRANDED BY LACK OF STANDBY SEATS

REF: HANCOCK/DOBRENUK TELCON 7/26/78

1. SUMMARY: LACK OF AVAILABLE SEATS FOR PASSENGERS
FLYING STANDBY TO US HAS STRANDED AN ESTIMATED SEVERAL
HUNDRED US CITIZENS IN LONDON. PRESSURE TO RETURN TO
US BEFORE START OF SCHOOL IN SEPTEMBER COMBINED WITH
PEAK SEASON REGULAR AIR TRAFFIC IS EXPECTED TO RESULT
IN SITUATION WORSENING THROUGHOUT AUGUST. EMBASSY
RECEIVING NUMEROUS COMPLAINTS NOT ONLY ABOUT LACK OF
SEATS BUT ALSO LACK OF INFORMATION AND ASSISTANCE FROM

CARRIERS. WHILE LATTER COMPLAINTS NOT NECESSARILY
MERITORIOUS, SERIOUS PUBLIC RELATIONS PROBLEMS SEEM TO BE
DEVELOPING FOR BOTH AIRLINES AND EMBASSY. EMBASSY
SUGGESTS ISSUANCE OF TRAVEL ADVISORY WARNING OF DELAYS
AND DIFFICULTIES IN RETURNING US VIA STANDBY AIR
TRANSPORTATION OUT OF LONDON. ASSISTANCE OF DEPARTMENT
AND OTHER APPROPRIATE USG AGENCIES REQUESTED IN EXPLORING
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WITH CARRIERS POSSIBLE WAYS TO REMEDY PROBLEM. (LOCAL
AIRLINE REPRESENTATIVES HAVE NO IDEAS THEY CONSIDER
FEASIBLE.) DEPARTMENT'S GUIDANCE TO EMBASSY ON
APPROPRIATE ACTION, PARTICULARLY USE OF REPATRIATION LOANS
ALSO REQUESTED. END SUMMARY.

2. AN ESTIMATED SEVERAL HUNDRED US CITIZENS NOW CONSIDER

THEMSELVES STRANDED IN LONDON BECAUSE OF SCARCITY OF
STANDBY SEATS ON FLIGHTS RETURNING TO THE US. MOST ARE
YOUNG PEOPLE WHO TRAVELED TO EUROPE THIS SUMMER ON
STANDBY OR LAKER SKYTRAIN AND ARE NOW TRYING RETURN TO
US THE SAME WAY. THE VOLUME OF SUCH PEOPLE NOW SEEKING
TRAVEL ALL AT THE SAME TIME PLUS BRITISH AND EUROPEAN
TOURISTS SEEKING TRAVEL INEXPENSIVELY TO US HAS RESULTED
IN SERIOUS BACKLOG FOR STANDBY SEATS. SOME OF THESE
CITIZENS ARE IN FACT STRANDED IN THAT THEY HAVE
INSUFFICIENT FUNDS EITHER TO PURCHASE FULL FARE TICKETS
OR PAY ACCOMMODATIONS WHILE WAITING STANDBY. SEVERAL
PERSONS HAVE ALREADY APPROACHED EMBASSY FOR LOANS TO
PURCHASE FULL FARE TICKETS OR FOR ACCOMMODATION WHILE
AWAITING STANDBY SEATS. NUMBER OF SUCH REQUESTS
EXPECTED TO GROW.

3. PRESSURE FROM YOUNG PEOPLE RETURNING TO START SCHOOL
IN SEPTEMBER COINCIDING WITH PEAK EUROPEAN VACATION
TRAVELS IS LIKELY TO RESULT IN SITUATION DETERIORATING
THROUGHOUT AUGUST AND EARLY SEPTEMBER.

4. EMBASSY RECEIVING GROWING NUMBER OF COMPLAINTS
DEMANDING EMBASSY OR USG INTERVENTION WITH AIRLINES TO
REMEDY SITUATION. MANY THREATEN RESORT TO MEDIA AND/OR
CONGRESSMEN FOR ASSISTANCE. EMBASSY CONSULAR SECTION
AND DUTY OFFICERS FACE INCREASED DIFFICULTY IN RESPONDING
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TO COMPLAINTS AND DEMANDS WHICH BECOME MORE UNREASONABLE
AS FRUSTRATION RISES. COMPLAINTS FREQUENTLY REVOLVE NOT
ONLY ON LACK OF SEATS BUT ON LACK OF INFORMATION FROM

NOTE BY OC/T: NOT PASSED EUROPEAN DIPLOMATIC POSTS BY OC/T.

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FM AMEMBASSY LONDON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8570

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AIRLINES AND ALLEGED POOR HANDLING OF INQUIRIES AND
STANDBY LINES. MANY PERSONS INDICATE THEY WERE TOLD BY
AIRLINES OFFICES IN LONDON AND OTHER EUROPEAN CITIES THAT
THEY WOULD EXPERIENCE NO DELAY IN RETURNING STANDBY FROM
LONDON.

5. CONTACTS WITH INDIVIDUAL AIRLINES' REPRESENTATIVES
HERE HAVE ELICITED LITTLE HOPE FOR IMMEDIATE IMPROVEMENT
IN SITUATION. SOME CARRIERS ARE CONSIDERING ADDING ONE
EXTRA FLIGHT PER WEEK. SEVERAL INDIVIDUALS HAVE BEEN
TOLD BY VARIOUS AIRLINES THAT NUMBER OF STANDBY SEATS
AVAILABLE WEEKLY IS LIMITED BY USG. HOWEVER, WE
UNDERSTAND THAT EVEN FIFTH FREEDOM CARRIERS HAVE
RELATIVELY LITTLE SPACE AVAILABLE FOR STANDBY AND BUDGET
TRAVELERS, SO SEAT LIMITATION IS OF RELATIVELY LITTLE
PRACTICAL IMPORTANCE AT MOMENT.

6. ACTION REQUESTED: FOR DEPARTMENT: REQUEST
APPROPRIATE TRAVEL ADVISORIES BE ISSUED WARNING OF
SEVERE DELAYS IN RETURNING US ON STANDBY FROM LONDON.
WOULD ALSO APPRECIATE DEPARTMENT'S APPROACHING CARRIERS,
PARTICULARLY PANAM AND TWA, TO ENCOURAGE ANY ACTIONS THEY
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MIGHT REASONABLY TAKE TO RELIEVE SITUATION. DOT, FAA OR
CAB MAY BE ABLE ASSIST OR ADVISE ON USG ACTIONS SUCH AS
APPROVING TEMPORARILY A RELAXATION OF CAPACITY LIMITS ON
STANDBY PASSENGERS ON FLIGHTS INTO US OR BY ENCOURAGING
ANY CARRIER TO US WHICH DOES NOT ALREADY HAVE A STANDBY
FARE TO INSTITUTE ONE DURING THIS CRISIS. ANY GUIDANCE
FROM DEPARTMENT ON COPING WITH INQUIRIES AND CASES OF
INDIVIDUAL HARDSHIP WILL BE APPRECIATED. WE UNDERSTAND
DEPARTMENT'S CONCERN THAT RELAXATION IN MAKING
REPATRIATION LOANS MIGHT OPEN THE FLOODGATES BUT BELIEVE
WE WILL BE FACED WITH INCREASING NUMBER OF WORTHWHILE
CASES RESULTING FROM SITUATION.

7. FOR EUR POSTS: WOULD APPRECIATE ANY ACTIONS OTHER

EUROPEAN POSTS CAN TAKE IN ADVISING CITIZENS AND LOCAL
AIRLINE OFFICES OF DIFFICULTIES AND DELAYS BEING
EXPERIENCED BY TRAVELERS ATTEMPTING TRAVEL US STANDBY
FROM LONDON.

BREWSTER

NOTE BY OC/T: NOT PASSED EUROPEAN DIPLOMATIC POSTS.

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